

Draft Environmental Assessment Alfalfa Field Renovation and Four-Year Agricultural Lease at Foyo Bend Fisheries Conservation Area

June 2018



Draft Environmental Assessment MEPA, NEPA, MCA 23-1-110 CHECKLIST

PART I. PROPOSED ACTION DESCRIPTION

1. Type of proposed state action: Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) proposes to renovate 49 acres of the Foys Bend Fisheries Conservation Area's (FCA) existing hay fields back to productive alfalfa hay. The fields in question were planted more than 15 years ago, and the alfalfa has run out and no longer competitive against invading weeds. To achieve this at no cost to the department, FWP will lease fields for a period of four years to a local grower, who in exchange for renovating fields will keep a negotiated portion of the harvest for their personal use or sale. Field renovation will restore agricultural productivity, reduce noxious weed encroachment, provide forage for wildlife, and reduce property management costs as productive fields can be managed through lease agreements with local growers.

2. Agency authority for the proposed action: FWP has the authority under Section 87-1-210 MCA to protect, enhance, and regulate the use of Montana's fish and wildlife resources for public benefit now and into the future. In addition, in accordance with the Montana Environmental Policy Act, FWP is required to assess the impacts that any proposal or project might have on the natural and human environments. Further, FWP's land lease-out policy, as it pertains to the disposition of interests in Department lands (87-1-209) requires an environmental assessment (EA) be written for all new agricultural leases, lease extensions, or lease renewals.

3. Anticipated schedule:

Public comment period:	June 18 – July 13, 2018
Decision notice:	July 17, 2018
Lessee selected:	August 24, 2018
Lease begins:	September 3, 2018
Lease ends:	September 15, 2022

4. Location affected by proposed action:

The Foys Bend Fisheries Conservation Area (FCA) in northwest Montana is located east of Kalispell on the Flathead River, about four miles downstream from the Old Steel Bridge. Foys Bend comprises 245 acres in Township 28N, Range 21W, portions of Sections 26, 34 and 35, Flathead County.

5. Project size:

	<u>Acres</u>		<u>Acres</u>
(a) Developed:		(d) Floodplain	<u>0</u>
Residential	<u>0</u>		
Industrial	<u>0</u>	(e) Productive:	
(existing shop area)		Irrigated cropland	<u>0</u>
(b) Open Space/	<u>0</u>	Dry cropland	<u>49</u>
Woodlands/Recreation		Forestry	<u>0</u>
(c) Wetlands/Riparian	<u>0</u>	Rangeland	<u>0</u>
Areas		Other	<u>0</u>

6. Listing of any other local, state, or federal agency that has overlapping or additional jurisdiction.

(a) Permits: Permits will be filed at least 2 weeks prior to project start.

<u>Agency Name</u>	<u>Permits</u>
NONE	REQUIRED

(b) Funding: This is a no-cost action as fields will be renovated in exchange for a four-year agricultural lease.

(c) Other overlapping or additional jurisdictional responsibilities:

<u>Agency Name</u>	<u>Type of Responsibility</u>
NONE	

7. Narrative summary of the proposed action or project including the benefits and purpose of the proposed action:

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) acquired the 245-acre Foys Bend FCA in May 2009 with funding from the Bonneville Power Administration's (BPA) mitigation program designated to mitigate fish habitat impacts associated with the construction of the Hungry Horse Dam. Prior to FWP acquisition, cattle were pastured throughout riparian areas, and much of the upland was cultivated in irrigated and dryland alfalfa. Today, riparian woodlands are reverting to a more natural state, but former hay fields are in decline. Fields are played out; alfalfa cover is decreasing and less desirable species encroaching. To achieve renovation at no cost to the department, FWP will lease hay fields to a local grower who, over a four-year period, will transition fields back into productive alfalfa hay fields. Fields will be planted for two seasons to cereal grain, then alfalfa, with one growing season required for establishment and one season at full productivity. In exchange for these services, through the duration of the lease, the lessee will harvest for personal use or sale, the resultant crop (two years of cereal grain, two years of alfalfa hay). After the four-year lease period, FWP will resume management of the alfalfa fields with the potential for additional leases into the future.

The fields in the proposed project area (Appendix 1) were historically irrigated and dryland alfalfa. When FWP acquired the property in 2009, irrigation ceased, and fields were managed with a single, late-season harvest. Fields have not been amended, and over time forage quality and productivity have declined. Today, forage quality is low, alfalfa cover poor, and cheat grass and Canada thistle are invading. Field condition is declining, and soon, FWP will be challenged to find a grower interesting in harvesting the hay. At such a time, FWP would be required to take on field management, for which we have neither the personnel nor equipment.

Field renovation will restore agricultural productivity, reduce noxious weed encroachment, provide forage for wildlife, and reduce property management costs.

8. Description and analysis of reasonable alternatives (including the no-action alternative) to the proposed action, whenever alternatives are reasonably available and prudent to consider, and a discussion of how the alternatives would be implemented:

Alternative A: No Action:

Under the No-Action Alternative, FWP would continue to manage the fields with a single late-season harvest.

- Field condition would continue to decline, with decreasing cover of desirable species (alfalfa and orchard grass) and increasing cover of undesirable species and noxious weeds.
- Noxious weeds may spread within the property boundaries and threaten adjoining properties.
- FWP would be required to commit additional resources for weed management and potentially field management and haying.
- Forage and cover for deer and other wildlife, including upland game birds, would decline.
- Wildlife habitat values and hunting opportunities on the FCA would suffer.

Alternative B: Proposed Action:

Under the Proposed Action, FWP would renovate 49 acres of run-out hay fields back into productive alfalfa hay. To do this at no cost to the Department, FWP will enter a four-year agricultural lease, whereby the lessee would renovate existing hay fields in exchange for some or all of the agricultural crop for a period of four years. Fields would be planted to cereal grains for two years to eliminate allelopathic chemicals in the soil, then planted to alfalfa in year three. The lease opportunity will be publicly advertised and lessee selected through a competitive bid process.

- Agricultural productivity would be restored and commercially marketable crop produced.
- Fields would remain productive well beyond lease term, enabling FWP to defray field management costs through competitively bid lease agreements.
- Noxious weeds would be controlled through agricultural practices and competitiveness of the planted crop.
- Productive agricultural lands would contribute to the economic viability of agricultural production within the Flathead Valley.
- Wildlife forage and cover will be enhanced over that provided by existing run-out fields.
- FWP property management costs would be reduced through agricultural lease agreements, whereby lessee would manage fields in exchange for a portion of the harvest.

PART II. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW CHECKLIST

1. Evaluation of the impacts of the Proposed Action including secondary and cumulative impacts on the Physical and Human Environment.

A. PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

1. <u>LAND RESOURCES</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Soil instability or changes in geologic substructure?		X				
b. Disruption, displacement, erosion, compaction, moisture loss, or over-covering of soil, which would reduce productivity or fertility?		X				
c. Destruction, covering, or modification of any unique geologic or physical features?		X				
d. Changes in siltation, deposition, or erosion patterns that may modify the channel of a river or stream or the bed or shore of a lake?		X				
e. Exposure of people or property to earthquakes, landslides, ground failure, or other natural hazard?		X				
f. Other:						

2. <u>AIR</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Emission of air pollutants or deterioration of ambient air quality? (Also see 13c.)			X			2a.
b. Creation of objectionable odors?		X				
c. Alteration of air movement, moisture, or temperature patterns, or any change in climate, either locally or regionally?		X				
d. Adverse effects on vegetation, including crops, due to increased emissions of pollutants?		X				
e. For P-R/D-J projects, will the project result in any discharge, which will conflict with federal or state air quality regs? (Also see 2a.)			X			2a
f. Other:						

2a. Under the Proposed Action, there would be minor impacts to air quality from farm equipment emissions and possibly spring burning of residual grain stubble.

3. <u>WATER</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Discharge into surface water or any alteration of surface water quality, including but not limited to temperature, dissolved oxygen, or turbidity?		X				
b. Changes in drainage patterns or the rate and amount of surface runoff?		X				
c. Alteration of the course or magnitude of floodwater or other flows?		X				
d. Changes in the amount of surface water in any water body or creation of a new water body?		X				
e. Exposure of people or property to water-related hazards such as flooding?		X				
f. Changes in the quality of groundwater?		X				
g. Changes in the quantity of groundwater?		X				
h. Increase in risk of contamination of surface or groundwater?			X			3h.
i. Effects on any existing water right or reservation?		X				
j. Effects on other water users as a result of any alteration in surface or groundwater quality?		X				
k. Effects on other users as a result of any alteration in surface or groundwater quantity?		X				
l. For P-R/D-J, will the project affect a designated floodplain? (Also see 3c.)		X				
m. For P-R/D-J, will the project result in any discharge that will affect federal or state water quality regulations? (Also see 3a.)		X				
n. Other:						

3h. Under the Proposed Action, the potential for minor impacts to water quality exists with the use of herbicides and pesticides. The lessee must comply with all provisions of federal and state laws regarding the use of such substances, which will minimize any potential impacts.

4. VEGETATION Will the proposed action result in?	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Changes in the diversity, productivity, or abundance of plant species (including trees, shrubs, grass, crops, and aquatic plants)?			X Positive			4a.
b. Alteration of a plant community?			X Positive			4a.
c. Adverse effects on any unique, rare, threatened, or endangered species?		X				
d. Reduction in acreage or productivity of any agricultural land?		X				
e. Establishment or spread of noxious weeds?			X Positive			4e.
f. For P-R/D-J, will the project affect wetlands or prime and unique farmland?		X				
g. Other:						

4a. The area has been hayed for many years, the alfalfa has played out, and hay quality is declining. Renovation on the FCA under the Proposed Action will increase availability of forage and cover for wildlife.

4e. Under either alternative, noxious weeds would be treated and controlled on the property. The Proposed Action alternative will reduce weed control costs as field renovation will increase crop's competitiveness and ability to exclude noxious weeds.

5. FISH/WILDLIFE Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Deterioration of critical fish or wildlife habitat?		X				
b. Changes in the diversity or abundance of game animals or bird species?			X Positive			5b.
c. Changes in the diversity or abundance of nongame species?			X Positive			5c.
d. Introduction of new species into an area?		X				
e. Creation of a barrier to the migration or movement of animals?		X				
f. Adverse effects on any unique, rare, threatened, or endangered species?		X				
g. Increase in conditions that stress wildlife populations or limit abundance (including harassment, legal or illegal harvest, or other human activity)?		X				
h. For P-R/D-J, will the project be performed in any area in which T&E species are present, and will the project affect any T&E species or their habitat? (Also see 5f.)		X				
i. For P-R/D-J, will the project introduce or export any species not presently or historically occurring in the receiving location? (Also see 5d.)		X				
j. Other:						

5b./5c. Game and nongame species will benefit from increased field productivity, which will provide both increased forage and cover for wildlife.

B. HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

6. <u>NOISE/ELECTRICAL EFFECTS</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Increases in existing noise levels?			X			6a.
b. Exposure of people to severe or nuisance noise levels?		X				
c. Creation of electrostatic or electromagnetic effects that could be detrimental to human health or property?		X				
d. Interference with radio or television reception and operation?		X				
e. Other:						

6a. Sound from operations of farming equipment will be sporadic and short-term in duration, and similar to what is created in the surrounding areas that are also farmed.

7. <u>LAND USE</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Alteration of or interference with the productivity or profitability of the existing land use of an area?			X Positive			7a.
b. Conflicted with a designated natural area or area of unusual scientific or educational importance?		X				
c. Conflict with any existing land use, the presence of which would constrain or potentially prohibit the proposed action?		X				
d. Adverse effects on or relocation of residences?		X				
e. Other:						

7a. Field renovation will restore field productivity and profitability.

8. <u>RISK/HEALTH HAZARDS</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Risk of an explosion or release of hazardous substances (including, but not limited to oil, pesticides, chemicals, or radiation) in the event of an accident or other forms of disruption?			X			8a.
b. Affect an existing emergency response or emergency evacuation plan, or create a need for a new plan?		X				
c. Creation of any human health hazard or potential hazard?		X				
d. For P-R/D-J, will any chemical toxicants be used? (Also see 8a.)		X				
e. Other:						

8a. Under the Proposed Action, there is the potential for minor impacts from the use of fertilizers and pesticides. The farmer will comply with all provisions of federal and state laws governing the usage of these substances in order to minimize risk.

9. <u>COMMUNITY IMPACT</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Alteration of the location, distribution, density, or growth rate of the human population of an area?		X				
b. Alteration of the social structure of a community?		X				
c. Alteration of the level or distribution of employment, or community or personal income?			X Positive			9c.
d. Changes in industrial or commercial activity?		X				
e. Increased traffic hazards or effects on existing transportation facilities or patterns of movement of people and goods?		X				
f. Other:						

9c. Under the Proposed Action, hay fields would be renovated and farmed, contributing to the viability of the local agricultural economy.

10. <u>PUBLIC SERVICES/TAXES/UTILITIES</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Will the proposed action have an effect upon or result in a need for new or altered governmental services in any of the following areas: fire or police protection, schools, parks/recreational facilities, roads or other public maintenance, water supply, sewer or septic systems, solid waste disposal, health, or other governmental services? If any, specify:		X				
b. Will the proposed action have an effect upon the local or state tax base and revenues?		X				
c. Will the proposed action result in a need for new facilities or substantial alterations of any of the following utilities: electric power, natural gas, other fuel supply or distribution systems, or communications?		X				
d. Will the proposed action result in increased use of any energy source?		X				
e. Define projected revenue sources.		X				10e.
f. Define projected maintenance costs.			X Positive			10f.
g. Other:						

10e. Under the Proposed Action, there is no monetary revenue projected for the project. As payment under the agricultural lease, the lessee will renovate run-out fields back into alfalfa hay and may retain a portion of the crop depending on final proposals.

10f. Under the Proposed Action, additional costs to FWP associated with periodic monitoring of agricultural production and weeds will be minimal since the FCA is routinely monitored by FWP, while maintenance costs on the fields would transfer to the lessee.

11. <u>AESTHETICS/RECREATION</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Alteration of any scenic vista or creation of an aesthetically offensive site or effect that is open to public view?		X				
b. Alteration of the aesthetic character of a community or neighborhood?		X				
c. Alteration of the quality or quantity of recreational/tourism opportunities and settings? (Attach Tourism Report.)			X Positive			11c.
d. For P-R/D-J, will any designated or proposed wild or scenic rivers, trails, or wilderness areas be impacted? (Also see 11a, 11c.)		X				
e. Other:						

11c. Under the Proposed Action, field renovation should increase the opportunity for public enjoyment of wildlife on the FCA through hunting and wildlife viewing.

12. CULTURAL/HISTORICAL RESOURCES Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. **Destruction or alteration of any site, structure or object of prehistoric historic, or paleontological importance?		X				
b. Physical change that would affect unique cultural values?		X				
c. Effects on existing religious or sacred uses of a site or area?		X				
d. For P-R/D-J, will the project affect historic or cultural resources? Attach SHPO letter of clearance. (Also see 12.a.)		X				
e. Other:						

These properties have been farmed for decades, and therefore no new or added impacts are anticipated under the Proposed Action. Intensive cultural inventories in 2010, that covered much of the property, found no cultural resources on the property.

SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA

13. SUMMARY EVALUATION OF SIGNIFICANCE Will the proposed action, considered as a whole:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Have impacts that are individually limited, but cumulatively considerable? (A project or program may result in impacts on two or more separate resources that create a significant effect when considered together or in total.)		X				
b. Involve potential risks or adverse effects, which are uncertain but extremely hazardous if they were to occur?		X				
c. Potentially conflict with the substantive requirements of any local, state, or federal law, regulation, standard, or formal plan?		X				
d. Establish a precedent or likelihood that future actions with significant environmental impacts will be proposed?		X				
e. Generate substantial debate or controversy about the nature of the impacts that would be created?		X				
f. For P-R/D-J, is the project expected to have organized opposition or generate substantial public controversy? (Also see 13e.)		X				
g. For P-R/D-J, list any federal or state permits required.		X				

Under the Proposed Action, there would be no direct cumulative or secondary impacts.

2. Evaluation and listing of mitigation, stipulation, or other control measures enforceable by the agency or another government agency:

Foys Bend FCA permits restricted public access. During the spring turkey season (generally about April 12 – May 15) and from the beginning of upland game bird until the end of waterfowl season (September 1 to about January 15), public access is allowed four days of the week, Friday through Monday. Party numbers are restricted to one party of no more than four people per day. During summer, from the end of spring turkey season until the start of upland game bird season, the area is open seven days per week to one party of no more than four adults and a maximum of 10 people total per day. All visitors must make reservations for this in person at FWP headquarters in Kalispell. Gates and fences around the FCA prevent vehicle access to most portions of the farmed fields to ensure crops are protected. Existing infrastructure and public access rules help mitigate the public's use of this area during the growing season to ensure that no environmental degradation or significant impacts occur to farming operations or fish, wildlife, and their habitats.

PART III. NARRATIVE EVALUATION AND COMMENT

This analysis did not reveal any significant impacts to the human or physical environment. No additional construction or improvements of any kind are included in this proposal. The current management plans and FCA rules provide for seasonal closures and additional restrictions.

PART IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

1. Public involvement for this project:

The public will be notified in the following manner to comment on this draft EA:

- Public notices to the Flathead Beacon and Daily Inter Lake.
- One statewide press release.
- Public notice on the FWP website: <http://fwp.mt.gov>

In addition, the draft EA is available at Region One FWP headquarters in Kalispell and notification was also made to neighboring landowners, current farming contractors, and interested parties to ensure their knowledge of the proposed project.

Duration of comment period:

This draft will be out for a 3-week public review through July 13, 2018.
Comments can be mailed to the address below:

Nancy Ivy
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
490 North Meridian Road
Kalispell, MT 59901

Or email: nivy@mt.gov

PART V. EA PREPARATION

1. Based on the significance criteria evaluated in this EA, is an EIS required? NO

Based upon the above assessment, which has identified a limited number of minor impacts from the Proposed Action, an EIS is not required and an environmental assessment is the appropriate level of review.

2. Persons responsible for preparing the EA:

Franz Ingelfinger, Restoration Ecologist
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Alan Wood, Wildlife Mitigation Coordinator
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
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3. List of agencies consulted during preparation of the EA:

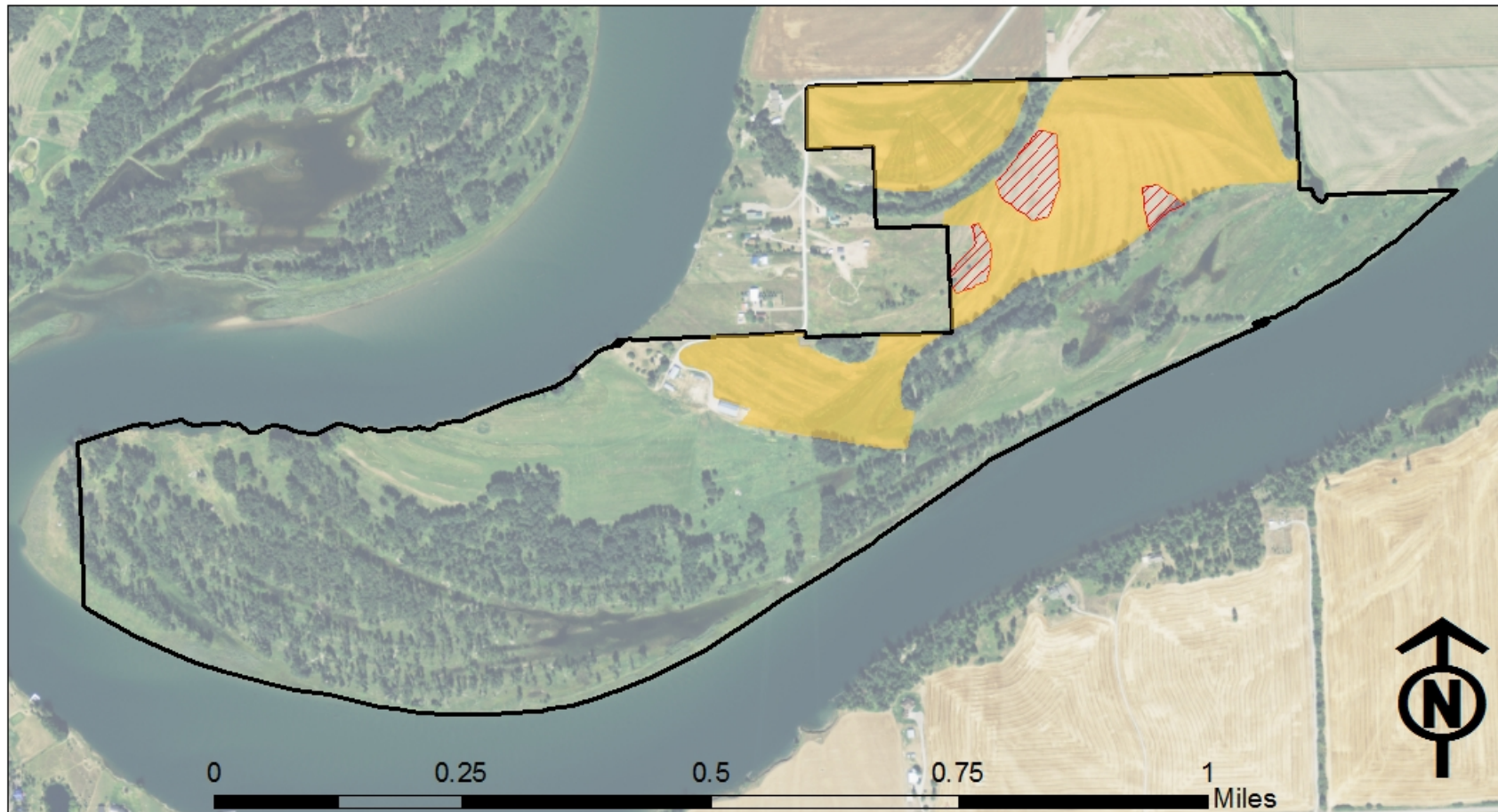
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Wildlife Division
Fisheries Division

Montana State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) was consulted on the Proposed Action Alternative through BPA's annual Environmental Compliance Review Process. SHPO concurred with BPA's finding that no historic properties would be affected by implementation of this action.

APPENDIX

1. Property Map

Appendix 1
Foyo Bend Fisheries Conservation Area
Agricultural Lease Area Highlighted in Yellow



Legend

- Lease Area
- Property Boundary
- Fenced Woody Plantings

FWP.MT.GOV



THE **OUTSIDE** IS IN US ALL.